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# THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND SIN. II

## HELP FROM THE COMMON DEEPER LIFE OF MEN

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In attempting frankly to face the perennial problem of evil, we have been dealing hitherto with what we have called preliminary considerations, in order to be sure that the sweep and conditions of the problem itself were correctly conceived. For there is plainly no cheap and easy solution of this question. Men have been universally occupied with it through the centuries, just because there are so many phenomena that seem to deny a purpose of love in the world. No mere re-examination of individual phenomena, then, will meet the case. We must make plain to ourselves that personal character is the only aim that will finally satisfy our thought; and we have seen that that goal, in the nature of the case, carries with it large possibilities of sin and suffering. We might expect, therefore, to find in the world many facts that would seem to deny a God of love. The solution of our whole problem lies fundamentally just here. But it is abundantly worth while to see that there is a mass of corroborating evidence that may confirm our faith in the goodness of God. We have already found that certain important and practically inevitable trends of our natures encourage the hope that the problem is not insoluble. And there were reasons to believe, too, that the particular fact of animal suffering raised no insuperable difficulty.

With the present article we turn to seek such help as may come from the common deeper life of men. For there are certain great considerations that have made a universal appeal to men who have had some depth of moral and reflective life. And they are considerations that deserve still to weigh with each individual, wrestling anew with man's darkest problem.

First of all, it has probably never escaped thoughtful men that their vision was greatly limited. *The smallness of man's view* cannot be ignored. The facts surveyed, the region within their knowledge, the data in any way at their command, were all too severely restricted to make an adequate judgment possible. Sometimes this has been asserted in humble faith, and sometimes in skeptical rebellion; but, whether in one way or the other, men have had to own that they did not have sufficient data to judge the ways of God. It has remained always possible that a few additional facts would quite change the seeming of things. We cannot judge the building, men have habitually urged with themselves, while the scaffolding is up. The world is too large, time and space too great, for our reach. Moreover, the world is in process; we can judge it only in the light of the final goal.

Does this consideration still deserve to weigh with thoughtful men today?

There is a curious passage in Lotze's *Microcosmus* in which, in a fashion, he seems to turn this attempted answer into a further objection, in his desire to deal with utter honesty with the problem of evil:

It may be said that evil appears only in particulars, and that when we take a comprehensive view of the great whole it disappears; but of what use is a consolation the power of which depends upon the arrangement of clauses in a sentence? For what becomes of our consolation, if we convert the sentence which contains it thus: The world is indeed harmonious as a whole, but if we look nearer it is full of misery?

But one wonders if, after all, this would not be a bit too ingenious, if it were intended to set aside the help coming from the consideration of the smallness of our view. So understood, it would certainly be inconsistent with some of Lotze's own deepest convictions. For example, he reminds us elsewhere that the viewpoint does make a vast and inevitable difference. Wherever purposes are being worked out at all, there one must have, for any final judgment, knowledge of the ends sought. And so we find him saying:

Only if, standing in the creative centre of the universe, we could fully scan the thought whence it has sprung, could we from it foretell the destinies of the individual called to contribute to its realization; this we cannot do from our human point of view that brings us face to face not with the Creator and His purposes, but only with the created. We stand [he says again] neither in our knowing nor in our acting at the motionless centre of the universe, but at the farthest extremities of its structure, loud with the whirl of machinery; and the impatient longing that seeks to escape

thence to the centre should beware of thinking lightly of the seriousness and magnitude of conditions under whose sway an irrevocable decree has placed our finite life.

And indeed, he is himself inclined to urge this necessary modesty of our speculation, as a chief consideration in what we may say concerning the problem of evil.

I have never cherished an assurance [he insists] that speculation possesses secret means of going back to the beginning of all reality, of looking on at its genesis and growth, and of determining beforehand the necessary direction of its movement; it seems to me that philosophy is the endeavor of the human mind, after this wonderful world has come into existence and we in it, to work its way back in thought and bring the facts of outer and of inner experience into connection, as far as our present position in the world allows.

Let us therefore alter a little [he would urge] the canon of Leibnitz, and say that where there appears to be an irreconcilable contradiction between the omnipotence and the goodness of God, there our finite wisdom has come to the end of its tether, and that we do not understand the solution which yet we believe in.

I cannot doubt, myself, that we may still well emphasize with ourselves the smallness of our view. Even in judging human conduct, we find how often our appraisal has been utterly changed by the knowledge of a few additional facts, or by some further glimpse into intentions. How much more, even without explanation, might one reasonably conclude that in judging the ways of God his highest wisdom would be, like the patriarch of old, to lay his hand upon his mouth and keep silence.

Moreover, if this consideration ever deserved to weigh with men, one might think it deserves to weigh still more now. The world has been so infinitely enlarged for our time, by modern science, in space and in time and in energy, that humility never more became men. I wonder increasingly whether an illustration of my own old theological instructor was exaggerated after all. He said that an insect crawling up a column of the Parthenon, painfully making its way around some pore in the stone, was as well fitted to judge of the architecture of the Parthenon as we, of the infinitude of God's plans. It may reasonably be that much that seems to us quite inexplicable would fall easily into its fit place, if only we could stand at the center with God and see his full purpose working itself out in all creation.

But modern science not only contains an argument for humility. In the immensely longer stretches of time and space which it opens out to men, it brings real relief to thoughtful souls by throwing some *additional light upon the probable trend of the world's development*. Similar light has come from a greatly enlarged historical perspective. In the light of evolution we can survey a far longer period, and can see what appears to be a "dramatic tendency"; and the goal to be achieved seems to be worth its cost. Evolution may thus be said to give to men the vision of a larger portion of the world's orbit in the inorganic, organic, and historic, and so to enable men better to estimate what kind of a curve it is to describe. While we still feel keenly the smallness of our view, there is given at the same time, thus, some added insight into the direc-

tion of the purpose of God, and so some better possibility of judging of the meaning of the whole process, and of even consciously and intelligently co-operating with God in the carrying-out of his purposes. So John Fiske feels that he is justified in contending that the "cosmic process exists purely for the sake of moral ends," and in asserting "the omnipresent ethical trend" of the universe.

Though in many ways God's work is above our comprehension [he says], yet those parts of the world's story that we can decipher well warrant the belief that while in Nature there may be divine irony, there can be no such thing as wanton mockery, for profoundly underlying the surface entanglement of her actions we may discern the omnipresent ethical trend. The moral sentiments, the moral law, devotion to unselfish ends, disinterested love, nobility of soul—these are Nature's most highly wrought products, latest in coming to maturity; they are the consummation toward which all earlier prophecy has pointed. We are right, then, in greeting the rejuvenescent summer with devout faith and hope. Below the surface din and clashing of the struggle for life we hear the undertone of the deep ethical purpose, as it rolls in solemn music through the ages, its volume swelled by every victory, great or small, of right over wrong, till in the fulness of time, in God's own time, it shall burst forth in the triumphant chorus of Humanity purified and redeemed.

More important than the immediate help derived from either of the considerations already named is the *help from man's faith in immortality*. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that we should be obliged to give up any solution of the problem of evil if faith in immortality were impossible. No

supposed substitutes for immortality seem to me at all to suffice at this point. They must appear only "words, words," to the souls wrested away from a noble friendship. Nor does this imply an essentially pessimistic view of life. Indeed, one might be quite ready to say with Le Gallienne, "Man is born to be in love with life, and in spite of all the sorrow that life brings along with its joy, it is only an occasional pessimist here and there that becomes estranged from it. The saddest will usually admit that it has been good to live." Still, one would have, even in that conviction, no sufficient answer to the problem of evil. It is just because men are made on so large a plan, with such capacity for endless growth, that we do not know how to harmonize with the wisdom and goodness of God the abrupt snuffing-out of their lives. The more life means, the deeper its joys, the more inexplicable is its utter ending. The goal which the universe has reached in man seems too great and too precious, and its cost too inestimable, to make rational or right the flinging-aside of human lives into the waste heap of the world. We cannot, then, solve our problem at all, if we may not keep our faith in immortality. It is because we can believe that this life is only a fragment of a larger whole, that we can still keep our faith in the love of God.

It is a fact most remarkable, when one reflects upon it, that men should have maintained so persistent a faith in immortality, in the teeth of all the appearances that death ends all. After all secondary explanations of this fact have been made, it remains remarkable and becomes itself an assurance of im-

mortality. Among all peoples, and in all times, though with very varying estimate of its content, men seem to have cherished something of an immortal hope of another life. And we need still to make sure that we are not underestimating the help which faith in immortality has to give in facing with courage and cheer the facts of sin and suffering.

And the perfect familiarity of the suggestion is not to be allowed to hide from us the fact that it is no slight consideration which is thus brought to view. If there is another life at all, that simple fact greatly affects our judgment of present conditions. The present life comes then to be thought of, almost inevitably, as a period of training, of learning how to live; and we do not try longer to estimate it as a finality. What we could not defend as final, we can conceive as not only defensible but as having a valuable function to perform, as temporary. And if that other life may be conceived as a life of still larger possibilities, fulfilling the best potentialities of the present life, the help to be gained from faith in immortality is yet greater.

Now, if one really believes in a future life of still larger possibilities, surely the whole aspect of things has changed for him. Even in the hardest of situations, he can still say, "This too shall pass away"; and

Because the way is *short*, I thank Thee, God.

To the common and natural hopes of men concerning immortality, Christ has added his own explicit assurance of the future life and of its satisfaction to us. It is plain that many of our greatest sorrows would cease, if we really believed

in the immortal hope; and at least it can certainly be said that the way to such faith is not closed; and that we have a right to use this large possibility as a part of our answer to the problem of evil.

There is further help for us from the common deeper life of men. For out of it have developed through the centuries the *four common views of suffering*, each of which has some aid to give in the solution of the problem of evil. The four views have each had many advocates, and all are represented in the Book of Job. These views are: that suffering is the punishment or direct consequence of sin; that it is present in life for the sake of discipline or chastening; that without it real virtue would hardly be possible to men; that there is no answer to the problem of suffering but the majesty of God. These views make some use of considerations already employed, but are suggestive in their interrelations, and as containing a kind of consensus of the thought of men on the problem of suffering. Concerning all explanations of suffering it is to be remembered that it is the suffering of the righteous for which men chiefly seek justification.

The view that all suffering is to be considered as the punishment or direct result of sin, is naturally one of the first suggested. It is the view of Job's "comforters." This theory tends to solve the difficulty of the suffering of the righteous, by denying that there are any righteous who could be exempt. The marked incongruities that the theory had to face in the suffering of little children, for example, drove men logically to extend the theory by the hypothesis of preceding existences

and of the transmigration of souls; so that suffering otherwise unexplained might be referred to sins in a previous existence. With or without this extension, the view that sin brings suffering certainly has in part a solid basis in human experience. No man can deal honestly with himself and not know that much of his suffering has come through his own sin. It was natural that this inference from self-observation should be extended to others, and so an attempt be made to explain all suffering as due to the sin of the sufferer, thus relieving God of all responsibility. Now the theory undoubtedly does explain much suffering; but closer and wider observation of life made it impossible to regard it as an explanation of all suffering. There was too obviously much disproportion between sin and suffering, and much suffering on the part of the innocent just because of the closeness of their relations to the guilty. And to apply the theory in judging others requires an intimacy of knowledge that no outside observer can have. We are no doubt justified in believing for all men that much suffering does follow directly on the sin of the sufferer; but we cannot safely apply the theory except to ourselves, and here we do well to apply it searchingly. One may wisely take many of his difficulties as only proper punishment for previous remissness, and uncomplainingly and courageously face them.

The view that suffering is to be regarded chiefly as discipline, as chastening, justly makes a wide appeal. In Job it is the view of Elihu. It is commonly used to supplement the first view, to account for the suffering of those at

least comparatively righteous. It, too, has a sound basis in experience. We have seen men and women strengthen and refine and grow under trial and sorrow. We have seen suffering thus apparently do what prosperity had failed to do. We know in our own cases that the presence of difficult circumstances has often brought out of us what easy times did not secure. Men naturally extended this theory, too, to try to cover all the facts. All moral and religious thinking has tended to make use of this view, and has found great help in it. And yet, taken alone, it is plainly not an adequate explanation of the facts of suffering. The distribution of suffering, its intensity and duration in many cases, the lack of it where it seems peculiarly needed, and the overplus where it seems much less needed—such facts as these, so far as man's insight can go, indicate the limitations of the theory.

And the theory has a further limitation, often disregarded by its defenders. After all, suffering in itself is not purifying, is no wonder-worker. The result depends on the individual's own reaction. As the sun softens the wax and hardens the clay, so suffering may either soften or harden, sweeten or embitter; it all depends on how it is taken. The theory tends to ignore or implicitly deny the helpful influence of joy as well as sorrow. All this does not forbid the thought that in God's intention suffering is often allowed for our discipline. We have already seen that character seems to require for its development some element of struggle; and this makes it certain that the disciplinary theory of suffering has solid justification. But we

cannot allow that suffering in itself has any magical power, or that all suffering is to be explained as disciplinary. Even when the first and second views are combined, much suffering seems still unaccounted for.

The third view of suffering, that without it virtue would hardly be possible to men, is the view suggested by the prelude of Job. This view is less immediately obvious than the two preceding views, but it roots in a genuine insight into what is morally necessary. The question really raised in the prelude of Job is whether there are any truly unselfish men of character; whether, after all, the seemingly virtuous man is not simply an example of prudential selfishness. "Doth Job serve God for naught?" the Adversary sneeringly asks. Does not the seemingly righteous and religious man simply see clearly that God has everything in his hands, and that, therefore, if man is to prosper he must, in mere prudence, do what God requires? If this is not to be the case, this view suggests that neither the certainty of God nor the certainty of the reward for righteousness must be too plain. It must be really true that the righteous often suffer, and suffer many times just because of their righteousness. It must often seem that God has forgotten. Reward must not follow too closely or too inevitably upon the righteous act. The great spiritual facts and rewards must be obscure enough to make unselfish virtue possible. One needs to be able to believe, for himself and for others, that bare prudential selfishness is not the final word. Men need in this sense the invisible God, and a seeming unreality of the spiritual

life. This is a consideration strongly urged by Kant, and felt increasingly since his time, until men have come to feel that they may well thank God that they live in a world in which there is a problem of evil, a world in which uncalculating, disinterested love is possible. For, as I have elsewhere said, "the greatest evil, after all, would be that conditions of genuine character should fail." Every such true soul is a new witness for the reality of God and the spiritual world—"Jehovah's champion."

"Reactions," eh? Well, what's your formula

For one particular kind—I won't insist  
On proof of every theorem in the list  
But only one—what chemicals combine,  
What  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ ,  
To cause such things as happened yesterday,  
To send a very gallant gentleman  
Into antarctic night, to perish there  
Alone, not driven nor shamed nor cheered  
to die,  
But fighting, as mankind has always fought,  
His baser self, and conquering, as mankind  
Down the long years has always conquered  
self?

What are *your* tests to prove a man's a  
man?

Which of *your* compounds ever lightly  
threw

Its life away, as men have always done,  
Spurred not by lust nor greed nor hope of  
fame

But casting all aside on the bare chance  
That it might somehow serve the Greater  
Good?

*There's* a reaction—what's *its* formula?

Produce *that* in your test-tubes if you  
can!

The fourth view of suffering—that there is no answer to the problem of suffering but the majesty of God—really falls back, in large measure, on the consideration of the smallness of our view, already dealt with. It is the view of the latter part of Job, and it suggests not only that the works and plans of God are quite certainly beyond our power to estimate; but also that in proportion as a man comes to know God, and to get even a poor appreciation of his character, his majesty, and his infinitude, he will leave the question readily in God's hands unanswered. He can believe where he cannot see.

I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the  
ear;

But now mine eye seeth Thee,  
Wherefore I abhor myself  
And repent in dust and ashes.

Job's questions are not answered, but the vision of the majesty of God suffices to give him faith and patience in the face of unanswered questions. This view allies itself naturally with the third view and supplements it by humbling man where the other exalts him. We are glad for all deeper insights into truth granted, but at the utmost we must own our weakness and folly in the face of the infinite majesty of God.

All four of the common views of suffering thus have elements of truth and genuine help; at some points they strike deeply into the heart of this difficult problem; and taken together they are a worthy result of the travail of men's souls through the centuries over this dark problem.